



Firwood Church

These are the notes of a sermon preached at Firwood Church by Andy Evans on the morning of the 15 February 2009; these notes are, therefore, intended to be read in conjunction with the sermon. To download sermons and other free resources, visit www.firwoodchurch.com or subscribe through iTunes.

SONGS OF ASCENT - PART 3, THE LORD MY DWELLING PLACE

Psalm 122

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

**¹I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the LORD!”**

**²Our feet have been standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem!**

**³Jerusalem- built as a city
that is bound firmly together,
⁴to which the tribes go up,
the tribes of the LORD,
as was decreed for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the LORD.**

**⁵There thrones for judgment were set,
the thrones of the house of David.**

**⁶Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!
“May they be secure who love you!**

**⁷Peace be within your walls
and security within your towers!”**

**⁸For my brothers and companions’ sake
I will say, “Peace be within you!”**

**⁹For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,
I will seek your good.**

1. INTRODUCTION

a. Background

The Songs of Ascent are a series of fifteen Psalms (120 through to 134) that were sung by pilgrims as they went up to the temple in Jerusalem to observe the major festivals and to worship the living God.

In the first week, we considered Psalm 120 and found the Psalmist in distress and living among a foreign people hostile toward the living God and the people of the living God. Last week we looked at Psalm 121 in which the Psalmist had left Kedar and Meshech, Jerusalem-bound. The Psalmist's anxiety now concerned the perils of the journey through mountainous and desolate terrain. The Psalmist rests secure, however, in the knowledge that the Lord will keep him safe. As we reach Psalm 122 we note that the focus has now shifted, no longer is the Psalmist alienated from the people of God and no longer is he facing the perilous journey to Jerusalem. The Psalmist is now standing in Jerusalem,¹

Psalm 122:2

**Our feet have been standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem!**

Interestingly, however, the Psalmist suggests that the relief and joy one would expect to find at the journey's end began altogether sooner,

Psalm 122:1

**I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the LORD!”**

In Hebrew, the first word of this Psalm is 'joy'. The Psalm begins with joy; it seems that the procession from Psalm 120 through to Psalm 134, chronologically speaking, at least, begins with joy. The Psalmist is living among a foreign people and his fellow believers exhort him to join them in the procession to Jerusalem and the Temple and the Psalmist rejoices.

It is important for us to understand the source of the Psalmist's joy, but in order to do this we must think clearly about how this Psalm fits with the transition from exile to pilgrimage to rest. The starting point, however, is to think clearly and biblically about the significance and relevance of Jerusalem, firstly, for the Psalmist and then, secondly, for the Christian at the beginning of the 21st Century.

I intend, therefore, to think about Jerusalem in the following categories,

- i. Historically,
- ii. Symbolically,
- iii. Prophetically.

2. JERUSALEM

a. Historically - a city established by God

Psalm 122 is attributed to David and, in verse 5; the Psalmist refers to the political and judicial rule of King David's house,²

Psalm 122:5

**There thrones for judgment were set,
the thrones of the house of David.**

This connection between King David, the city of Jerusalem and the Temple is important.

i. A God-ordained King and a God-ordained city

David's path to kingship begins in the most unlikely of circumstances. Saul is already established as king of Israel and has a son, Jonathan, who, by rights, would have expected to inherit the throne. Meanwhile, David, a boy, is the youngest son of a farmer, Jesse, working out in the fields of Bethlehem. He a most unlikely candidate for King, but Scripture reminds us that,

1 Samuel 16:7b

[...] the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.

The Lord sends the prophet Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint this young boy as King of Israel. As David grows, the Lord works powerfully and miraculously in his life and elevates him to a position whereby his popularity exceeds that of King Saul; indeed, even Jonathan recognises the hand of the Lord at work and we are told that 'Jonathan loved [David] as his own soul' (1 Samuel 18:1).

We see a biblical principle at work in David, that is now applied to all of those who believe in Christ Jesus,

1 Corinthians 1: 27-29

²⁷...God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

God elevates David, a most unlikely and unremarkable candidate for king, that God might receive maximum glory. David becomes King and for the first seven and a half years, he rules Judah from Hebron (2 Samuel 5:5). Scripture then describes the circumstances in which David comes to occupy Jerusalem as his capital.

2 Samuel 5:6-10

⁶And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who said to David, ‘You will not come in here, but the blind and the lame will ward you off’ - thinking, ‘David cannot come in here.’ ⁷Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David. ⁸And David said on that day, ‘Whoever would strike the Jebusites, let him get up the water shaft to attack “the lame and the blind,” who are hated by David’s soul.’ Therefore it is said, ‘The blind and the lame shall not come into the house.’ ⁹And David lived in the stronghold and called it the city of David. And David built the city all around from the Millo inward. ¹⁰And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him.

And so David conquers Jerusalem, but note the arrogance of the Jebusites, “You will not come in here, but the blind and the lame will ward you off”. The Jebusites’ confidence is grounded on the fact that Jerusalem is built upon a mountain and this made it almost impregnable. It is likely that Zion means either ‘castle’ or ‘citadel’, the point being that the Jebusites were exceedingly confident that their citadel, Zion, even if defended by ‘the lame and the blind’, would stand against any advancing army.³

But David is victorious. It is important, however, to note how Scripture views this victory. Should this triumph be attributed to David’s cunning and military prowess? No, we are told that, ‘David became greater and greater, *for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him*’ (v. 10). David’s victory was a result of the mighty hand of God working through him.

Jerusalem represents two things, therefore; firstly it is a city appointed by the Lord to be ruled by a king appointed by the Lord, and secondly, it is a mighty city defended by a mighty God.

The Psalmist celebrates this truth in Psalm 122,

Psalm 122:3

**Jerusalem- built as a city
that is bound firmly together**

The Psalmist recognises that this city has been built well; it is strong and it is well defended. It is true that King David built and expanded the city (‘David built the city all around from the Millo inward’, 2 Samuel 5:9b), but the Psalmist recognises that the city’s true strength comes from the Lord.

In Psalm 48, the Psalmist writes of this most clearly,

Psalm 48:12-14

**¹²Walk about Zion, go around her,
number her towers,
¹³consider well her ramparts,
go through her citadels,
that you may tell the next generation
¹⁴that this is God,
our God forever and ever.
He will guide us forever.**

The point is this, as we consider the city's strength and security, we must be reminded of the might, splendour and magnificence of the living God. Consider the progression of thought here, the Psalmist invites us to examine the construction and strength of the city, but with an application point in mind, 'consider... *that you may tell the next generation that this is God*'. Now clearly the Psalmist is not making an ontological observation that the stone walls and towers are literally the embodiment of God. Rather, the Psalmist recognises that the history of Jerusalem is so bound up with the might activity of God, that the security, magnificence and might of the city so reflects the character of God, that to look upon the city will invariably cause one to think of God. In this we see that the City of David is, more properly considered, the City of God.

This is why, in Psalm 122, the Psalmist addresses the security of the city in these terms,

Psalm 122:6-7

**⁶Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!
'May they be secure who love you!'
⁷Peace be within your walls
and security within your towers!'**

The Psalmist understands that the safety of Jerusalem is not grounded upon the breadth of its walls and armaments, but upon the might of the living God. How can we ensure the safety of the city of God? By praying to the living God.

b. Symbolically - the place where God set His Name

i. Where God set His Name

Jerusalem was more than a city and more even than the City of David; was the place God had chosen to set his Name.

2 Samuel 7:8-16

...Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I took you from the pasture, from

following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. ⁹ And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ¹⁰And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹ from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. ¹²When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, ¹⁵but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. ¹⁶And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.'

The Lord promises David four things; the first is **relationship**:

I have been with you wherever you went (v. 9)

and to David's son,

I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son [...] my steadfast love will not depart from him... (v. 14-15)

The second is **peace and security**,

And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more... (v. 10)

I will give you rest from all your enemies (v. 11)

The third is **an everlasting kingdom** (I return to this more fully, below),

And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth (v. 9)

And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever. (v. 16)

And fourthly, most importantly,

He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever (v. 13)

This fourth promise is the most important, in that the previous three promises flow from it. **God will dwell with his people** in relationship, will ensure their security and establish an eternal kingdom (for he is an eternal God).

The phrasing of this promise is important also, 'He shall build a house *for my name*' (v. 13). Elsewhere the promise is that God will dwell with his people, but in this we should not presume that God is somehow restricted to a particular place and location. It is most appropriately understood in the sense that God chooses to place his name, to manifest his glory most clearly, to bestow his blessings most bountifully in a particular place.⁴

This 'house' is located in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is, therefore, the place that God has chosen to fix his name, to manifest himself most clearly, to dwell. This is reflected in Psalm 122 and this is why,

Psalm 122:4

**...the tribes go up,
the tribes of the LORD,
as was decreed for Israel,
to give thanks to the *name of the LORD*.**

The Psalmist is clear that, in travelling up to Jerusalem, up to the temple, he is, in fact, drawing close to God. God has set his name in this particular place. The Psalmist travels up to this place that he might 'give thanks to the name of the Lord'.

ii. A city that reflects the character of God

Because Jerusalem was the place where God had fixed his name, to dwell in the city was to dwell with the living God. We see, therefore, that the city reflects something of the character of God,

- **Justice**

Psalm 122:5

**There thrones for judgment were set,
the thrones of the house of David.**

Pilgrims, when travelling to Jerusalem to observe the festivals, would probably have taken the opportunity to sue for justice and settle disputes. God is a God of justice and so too justice would be dispensed from the city in which he had fixed his name.

- **Peace**

Psalm 122:6a and 7a

⁶Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!

[...]

⁷Peace be within your walls

[...]

This is more than simply peace from enemies, the Hebrew word is *shalom* and is rich in its breadth and depth. Certainly the promise does encompass peace from strife and warfare, but, more particularly, it is the kind of peace only found when believers come together in unity of purpose and heart to worship the living God.

- **Security**

Psalm 122:6-7

⁶Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!

‘May they be secure who love you!’

⁷Peace be within your walls

and security within your towers!

The security of the people of God is dependent upon the security of the City of David. The security of the City of David is dependent upon the mighty arm of God. Jerusalem is strong because that is where the living God dwells and the living God is mighty indeed.

Psalm 46

**¹God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.**

**²Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,**

³though its waters roar and foam,

though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

Selah

**⁴There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.**

**⁵God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.**

**⁶The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.**

**⁷The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.**

Notice the intimate connection between the character and might of God and the character and might of the city of God, the two are almost synonymous. The point being this, God dwells within this city and, to reside in Jerusalem was, in some strange way, to dwell with (and even *in*) God.

Psalm 91:1-2

**¹He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.**

**²I will say to the LORD, 'My refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust.'**

This is important. The expectation is that the people of God would see and marvel at the security and refuge offered by the city of God and that this would lead them to understand that it is God, not the walls and ramparts, that offers true and unfailing protection and, in recognising this, that the people would be drawn into the shadow of the Almighty.

c. Prophetically - the Son of David

There is often great misunderstanding when approaching Old Testament texts like this and the danger is that we can begin to think of this call in geographical terms: that when we are in that particular place we are somehow *closer* to God. This place might be Jerusalem, and there has been a revival of interest in present-day Israel within some Evangelical circles, it might be a church building or a particular event.

Now it is true that there maybe times when we attend particular events or visit particular places when God *feels* altogether closer than at other times. This is, I think, natural and entirely different from the concern I express above. The danger comes when we begin to believe that the degree to which God is able to bless is somehow tied in with a particular place. We must take care, therefore, when reading,

Psalm 122:1

**I was glad when they said to me,
'Let us go to the house of the LORD!'**

How should this be read? When we read of the Psalmist going up, should we too buy our plane tickets to Jerusalem with gladness? When we read of the Psalmist going up to the temple, should we take this as an exhortation to attend church more often?

Well, there is some value in visiting Israel and Jerusalem. In seeing Israel and Jerusalem, we are able to picture the situation and events recorded in Scripture more vividly. It is helpful (and no doubt encouraging and deeply moving) to be able to walk where Jesus walked.

So too, we should meet together often. Scripture tells us that that the early believers met with one another 'day by day' (Acts 2:46) and the writer of Hebrews exhorts us not to neglect to meet together (Hebrew 10:25).

There is, however, a deeper truth with regard to how we should think about the Temple and the city of God; this greater truth is found in Jesus.

i. Jesus dwells among us

John 1:14

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

In the Old Testament we see that God fixes his Name upon a particular building (the Temple), in a particular city (Jerusalem) and among a particular nation (Israel). In this way, God acts, blesses, judges and makes himself known. He is, however, still altogether *other*. Indeed, in the theophanies of the Old and New Testament, the appearance of God is accompanied by a cloud (1 Kings 8:10 and Mark 9:7): God makes himself known and yet remains unsearchable (Psalm 145:3, 147:5).

Christ is the perfect theophany. In Christ, God becomes flesh, God dwells among us and the invisible God makes himself known; Jesus is 'the image of the invisible God' (Colossians 1:15) and the 'exact imprint of his nature' (Hebrews 1:3).

ii. Jesus is the meeting place between God and man

John 2:13-22

¹³The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. ¹⁵And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

¹⁸“So the Jews said to him, ‘What sign do you show us for doing these things?’ ¹⁹Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ ²⁰The Jews then said, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?’ ²¹But he was speaking about the temple of his body. ²²When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Jesus identifies himself with the temple and we see that, through the cross, he fulfills every aspect of temple worship. He is the acceptable sacrifice, he is the great high priest, he is the means by which we draw close to God and he intercedes on behalf of those who love him. The writer of Hebrews celebrates this new confidence that we have in Christ, by which we are able to approach the throne room of the living God,

Hebrews 10:19-22

¹⁹Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Jesus is the means by which we draw close to God. Scripture no longer calls us to draw near to a particular place at a particular time. Rather, Scripture exhorts us to draw near to a person and that person is Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, the Son of God.

iii. Jesus is the eternal King who establishes the eternal Davidic Kingdom

Remember God's promise to David, that 'Your throne shall be established forever' (2 Samuel 7:16)? Jesus is the fulfilment of this promise. He is the King of the Universe and one day he will return to rule and reign in righteousness and peace from his capital, the New Jerusalem.

4. CONCLUSION

a. The people of God

i. We are a city on a hill

Matthew 5:13-15

¹³“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.

¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.”

Pastor Mark Driscoll ([Mars Hill Church](#), Seattle) often describes the church as a ‘city within a city’. By this Driscoll means that the church should mirror to the city the character and values of Christ with regard to how we handle money, conduct business, honour marriage and pursue relationship. In this respect, therefore, the church is called to function in the same way as Jerusalem. The Psalmist looks to Jerusalem and he sees all of the characteristics and values of the living God displayed and through this he sees the hand of the living God at work. The church, similarly (and, indeed, more perfectly than Jerusalem) is called to shine forth the character, the values, the heart and the very glory of the living God that many might see and be drawn towards Christ.

Jerusalem prefigures the church, the true city on a hill shining forth the light of Christ.

ii. We look to the coming city

As believers we understand that the church is imperfect because we still struggle with weakness and sin. We live in hope, however, that there is a better kingdom to come and that King Jesus will remake this spoiled universe and that we will see, “the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.” (Revelation 21:10)

iii. We are the temple of God

1 Peter 2:4-5

⁴“As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

The imagery Peter uses is that of the temple; as believers in Christ we are now being built up into a ‘spiritual house’. This begins with us drawing close to the ‘living stone’, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, the ‘living stone’ is also the cornerstone upon which the church is ground, Peter quotes from Isaiah 28:16,

1 Peter 2:6

**Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.**

5. APPLICATION

i. We are called to encourage one another in our pursuit of Christ

Psalm 122:1

**I was glad when *they* said to me,
‘Let us go to the house of the LORD!’”**

The Psalmist, King David, is encouraged and spurred on to obedience and worship by his fellow believers. Their worship results in the Psalmist worshipping.

ii. We are called to joyful obedience

Psalm 122:3-4

**³Jerusalem- built as a city
that is bound firmly together,
⁴to which the tribes go up,
the tribes of the LORD,
as was decreed for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the LORD.**

The pilgrimage is decreed (v. 4) and it is an act of obedience, however, the Psalmist responds to God's command with joy. Christ too calls those who love him into a life of joyful, not begrudging, obedience.

iv. We are called to pray for the people of God

Psalm 122:6-9

**⁶Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!
‘May they be secure who love you!
⁷Peace be within your walls
and security within your towers!’
⁸For my brothers and companions’ sake
I will say, ‘Peace be within you!’
⁹For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,
I will seek your good.**

The Psalmist exhorts his fellow worshippers to 'pray for the peace of Jerusalem'. How should we understand this? Are the Scriptures exhorting believers today to pray for Jerusalem? The answer is both yes and no.

The truth is that, as believers, we should be praying wherever we see a need. As we look toward the Middle East and see war and unrest we should most certainly pray for the peace of Jerusalem. We should also pray for the peace of Gaza, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Lebanon, etc. We should pray also for China, for Africa and for Europe. Christians should and must pray!

The application of this Psalm is, however, altogether more profound. If we read closely, we see that the Psalmist is careful to define precisely what we are being called to pray for,

“May *they* be secure who love you!” (6b)

Who are the '*they*' referred to in verse 6, verse 8 makes this explicit,

**For my brothers and companions' sake
I will say, 'Peace be within you!'**

How then should we understand this exhortation? I believe the Psalmist is calling us to pray fervently for the believing community, the people of God. He is urging us to for the church, that we would be a place of refuge, a place of peace, a place in which the mercy and justice of God is most clearly manifest, which lead me to my final point.

v. We are called to bring glory to Christ

Psalm 122:9

**“For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,
I will seek your good.”**

Jerusalem was the place where God had fixed his name and his reputation. Peace, security and justice mattered, it was important that the city reflected his character and his values. Christ has set his name on us and his reputation is bound up with the integrity of the church. We seek the good of the church, we strive after purity, holiness and maturity in the church that Christ might be most glorified.

¹ It is important to remember that, although Psalm 120-134 are connected by the heading, 'Songs of Ascent' and that this inscription is underpinned by cultic tradition, they are not necessarily ordered in a progressive chronological order. We should not, therefore, expect to find narrative cohesion across the collection. Consequently, in 122 the Psalmist stands in Jerusalem and rejoices. This corporate sense of praise will not resume until we reach Psalm 134.

² There is dispute among scholars with regards to authorship; the Psalm refers to the temple which is not built until after his death. The inscription 'Of David' literally reads, 'Davidic', it is argued, therefore, that this Psalm is simply about David rather than claiming Davidic authorship. L.C. Allen proposes that this Psalm is Messianic and looks towards the coming David. I incline towards C.H. Spurgeon who argues for Davidic authorship and that David is writing prophetically of the coming temple, see L.C. Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary: Volume 3, Psalms 101-150* (Thomas Nelson Inc.: Columbia, 2002), p. 213 and C.H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, (Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville, 1997), p. 1287

³ T. Longman III & P. Enns (Eds), *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings* (Inter-Varsity Press: Illinois & Nottingham, 2008), p. 936

⁴ W. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Inter-Varsity Press: Leicester, 1994, [2005]), pp. 175-177

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